

Abstract

Each copy elements of data being an object to be monitored such as printing data or reading data including at least one kind of copy elements is monitored according to at least one kind of copy inhibition information stored in inhibition information storage means and capable of being updated. By the monitoring, when one of the copy elements is judged to agree with the kind of coy inhibition information, input or output of the data being monitored is inhibited. Secrecy management information is given to the copy inhibition information, and a secrecy management level of a user is assigned to each user. In such a way, when the secrecy management level is higher than that of secrecy management information, the inhibition of the input or output is canceled. An ID for tracing a device which has copied a printed matter is given to the copied printed matter so as to prevent unauthorized copies form diffusing.

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